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SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM GAZA

Substitutions

1. Essa bin Mohammed al-Zedjali, owner of the Arabic daily "al-Shabibah," penned an op-ed piece in the August 21 issue (which was translated and reprinted in its sister English-language daily "Times of Oman") entitled "Sharon Replaces Gaza With West Bank":

"The dismantling of the settlements in the Gaza Strip after an occupation that lasted more than thirty years is the biggest blow to the Zionist entity's government and an end to its dream of establishing a grand state... This is, no doubt, a moment to rejoice for the Palestinians, but they should not throw caution to the wind. Sharon has already made it clear that he is planning to replace the Gaza Strip with the West Bank, and his government has received the green light from the U.S. for establishing new settlements in the West Bank. He is hell-bent on prolonging the occupation, and his decision to withdraw from the Gaza Strip is no more than an attempt to buy time, and not a genuine step towards solving the conflict."

Calculations

2. "Al-Shabibah" also published an op-ed piece by Nasser al-Yahmady on August 20 under the headline "What Comes After The Evacuation?":

"The long-awaited withdrawal from Gaza finally took place; however, tears of joy should not stop us from being cautious about the consequences of this event. There are four scenarios that might take place in the aftermath: a civil war, the renewal of the intifadah, the continuation of resistance, or the activation of settlements in Jerusalem. The withdrawal from Gaza was a calculated political move, intended to show the world that Israel is willing to compromise with the Palestinians. This ostensible desire for peace on the part of the Israelis, however, simply masks Sharon's interest in increasing control over the West Bank."

Predictions

3. The government-owned Arabic-language daily "Oman" featured an editorial on August 21 entitled "The Settlement Strategy":

"To make this withdrawal work, the Palestinians need to control the Gaza Strip and other areas under their authority in the West Bank. They must administer these territories properly in order to prevent Sharon from re-invading Gaza if he feels threatened. There have been many changes inside both Israel and Palestine, and the withdrawal may unleash other forces that could cause additional conflicts... Will Sharon succeed in placing himself next to Ben-Gurion and Begin? The answer is very much connected to the consequences of this withdrawal and the establishment of the Palestinian state."

BALTIMORE